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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003283

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TAGS: PGOV IZ

SUBJECT: IRAQIS DENOUNCE SENSE OF CONGRESS RESOLUTION ON FEDERALISM IN IRAQ

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Corrected text in para 6

¶1. (U) Many Iraqi politicians have denounced the U.S. Senate's adoption on September 26 of a non-binding resolution calling for an Iraqi political settlement based on federalism. In comments to journalists two days later, Prime Minister Maliki termed the resolution a "catastrophe" and called for a special session of Iraq's Council of Representatives to discuss the issue. In a September 30 press conference, leaders of the Iraqiya party, Hiwar, the Tawafuq bloc, and the Sadr Trend blasted the resolution as well. Iraqiya CoR member Ezatt Al-Shabender read a statement saying the Senate resolution came at the very moment when support for sectarianism was waning as more and more Iraqis demanded a government based on efficiency, integrity and the ethics of citizenship. Sadr Trend CoR bloc leader Nasr al-Rubai'e called upon the other political parties to agree not to approve the creation of any new Iraqi region before the last U.S. soldier departed Iraq. Hiwar leader Salih Mutlaq said that while his bloc did not necessarily oppose federalism, the timing was not appropriate.

¶2. (C) The Iraqi press has been equally critical, with somewhat misleading headlines decrying "the American decision to divide Iraq" (Al-Sabah/Al-Zaman). The independent daily newspaper al-Mada noted on Saturday 29 unanimity between Iraqis inside and outside of the country against the Senate resolution. Much of the criticism seems to be based on ignorance of what the resolution actually says. During a Sept. 30 iftar hosted by the Ambassador, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih debated the resolution with Minister of the Interior Jawad Bulani and GOI Spokesman Ali Dabagh -- both of whom admitted that they had not read the resolution, but were simply reacting to what they had heard about it. DPM Salih explained that the resolution's language was based on the Iraqi constitution, made clear that decisions about Iraq's future were up to Iraqis, and avoided any reference to sectarian/ethnic divisions. By the end of the discussion, Bulani and Dabagh remained unconvinced, but Salih seemed to have made some headway in persuading them that there was nothing in the resolution they need fear.

¶3. (U) Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari (like DPM Barham a Kurd) told CNN that the resolution had "created a backlash, but needs to be explained more....(it) is in line with what (the Iraqi Constitution) has called for, to establish a federal democratic Iraq in the future." Zebari added that "No Iraqi is for dividing their country or for splitting it into three weak states, unable to survive."

¶4. (U) In general, the resolution received a warmer reception in the Kurdish Region (KRG), where KRG spokesman Khaled Salih welcomed the resolution and said a federal arrangement for the Iraqi state was "the only viable solution to the problems of Iraq." Salih added: "The people of Kurdistan . . . see in

federalism the promise of stability and freedom from dictatorial regimes."

15. (C) Comment: At a time when few Iraqi politicians appear keen to take the difficult decisions necessary to effect genuine reconciliation, the political leadership's negative (if largely uninformed) reaction to the Senate resolution is a reminder that most of those same politicians remain firmly wedded to the notion of a unified Iraqi state. The Embassy's Sept. 30 statement, which the media has spun as a criticism of the Senate resolution, will likely reassure many of our Iraqi interlocutors that the USG is not pushing for Iraq's dismemberment. At the same time, the Senate resolution may prove useful in reminding Iraqis that failure to demonstrate meaningful political progress may renew Congressional calls for alternative solutions.

16. (U) Text of September 30, 2007 Embassy press release:

In view of the non-binding resolution concerning Iraq passed by the United States Senate on September 27, the Embassy wishes to make clear that it remains the firm policy of the American Administration to support a stable, secure, and unified Iraq.

Our goal in Iraq remains the same: a unified, democratic, federal Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself. Iraq's leaders must and will take the lead in determining how to achieve these national aspirations.

As we have said in the past, attempts to partition or divide Iraq by intimidation, force or other means into three separate states would produce extraordinary suffering and bloodshed. The United States has made clear our strong

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opposition to such attempts.

The Iraqi people adopted a constitution in October 2005, which includes provision for possible expansion of federal structures in Iraq. Iraqis are now considering ways to improve that constitution, but partition is not on the table.

The United States fully supports the Iraqis in their efforts to achieve peace and stability.

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